"REESTABLISHING THE LINK"

THE NEED FOR TRANSPORTATION/LAND USE PLANNING TO SUPPORT INCREASED PUBLIC TRANSIT USE IN SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA

A DISCUSSION PAPER

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INTRODUCTION/PURPOSE

The Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) of 1991, provides the current federal funding and policy guidance for highway, transit, freight, pedestrian and bicycle planning in the United States. A key aspect of ISTEA is the policy goal of linking transportation and land use planning at the state, area and local levels. The intent of this linkage is to promote better transportation plans and projects through thorough consideration of land use, public facility, environmental quality and community development needs and objectives, including open public involvement throughout the planning process. This approach is in contrast with much of the past land use and transportation planning, which was often done in a vacuum.

In this regard, through the cooperative forum provided by the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission and various task forces established by the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) has advocated the need for effective transportation/land use planning at all governmental levels. SEPTA believes the benefits of coordinated transportation and land use planning will yield more livable and sustainable communities, while at the same time, enhancing the prospects for public transit services and facilities as alternatives to total reliance on the private automobile for regional mobility.

This discussion paper is intended to provide the reader with background on the state of land use planning in the region and the Commonwealth, while also reviewing the problems that have resulted from "business as usual" and the opportunities that "reestablishing the link" can create for the future. Reactions and questions about the paper are welcome; comments can be sent to SEPTA, Long Range Planning Department, 1234 Market Street, 9th Floor, Philadelphia, PA 19107.

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I. PERSPECTIVES ON GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

Growth and development .... Three words that represent different things to different people. It depends on your point of view:

Chamber of Commerce: To the local chamber of commerce growth and development means prosperity, jobs, profits and good times.

Developer: To the developer growth and development also mean good times, the ability to develop land, to provide residential, commercial or industrial buildings for prospective owners or tenants and the opportunity to share in the economic advancement of their community, county and region.

Elected Official: To the elected official growth and development can have two sides: one quite positive and one potentially negative. From the positive perspective, elected officials want to promote their community to generate tax revenues and to encourage jobs and prosperity. In this regard they share the viewpoints of the chamber of commerce and the developer. On the other hand, the elected official must also be mindful of the concerns of their constituents and the overall quality of life in their community. They have to **see it both ways**, because they need to be concerned about both the **short term** and the **long term** consequences of growth and development.

They have to ask tough questions about **what** development is occurring, **where** it is located, **how** it will be serviced, **what** access it will have and **what** the impact will be on both nearby neighborhoods and on the community as a whole.

Local Residents: To local residents, growth and development usually has a negative connotation -- not because they are against the benefits that flow from development, but because they are concerned about the real or perceived negative consequences for themselves, their neighborhood or the community. Often, as a reflection of human nature, the degree of opposition to growth and development varies directly with the proximity of a proposed project to a person's home or neighborhood. Hence, the infamous NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) syndrome and LULU's (Locally Unwanted Land Uses). Also, opposition to growth often grows dramatically among the most recent arrivals in a community.

Given these different perspectives, how does anything get accomplished? One way, at least in southeastern Pennsylvania, is through the local government planning process. Through Act 247, "The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code," local governments are empowered to prepare and enact comprehensive plans, zoning ordinances and subdivison and land development ordinances to plan for and regulate where, what, and how growth and development will occur in their community.

II. PLANNING IN PENNSYLVANIA

Planning in Pennsylvania is locally-oriented for two reasons: First, every square inch of the Commonwealth's land area is under local jurisdiction-- there are no unincorporated places and counties are "umbrella" governments which include municipalities within their boundaries.

Second, the Municipalities Planning Code (MPC) gives both municipalities and counties the right to prepare and enact comprehensive plans, zoning ordinances and subdivision and land development ordinances. However, the intent is clearly for municipalities to have control over their destiny; municipal enactment of a zoning ordinance or subdivision and land development ordinance automatically repeals a similar county ordinance that applies to that community.

Unfortunately, the record of planning and ordinance adoption across the Commonwealth is **not** good. Only about 60 percent of Pennsylvania's 2,573 townships, boroughs and cities have prepared comprehensive plans or enacted zoning ordinances and only 50 percent have a planning commission. Several of Pennsylvania's 67 counties have still not prepared their first comprehensive plan, and a requirement that they do so was not added to the MPC until 1988.

The record of planning and ordinance enactment in southeastern Pennsylvania's five counties and 239 municipalities is the highest in the Commonwealth. All five counties (the City of Philadelphia is both a city and a county) have adopted comprehensive plans and, with few exceptions, all of the local governments have a comprehensive plan, zoning ordinance and subdivision and land development ordinance.

This high level of plan and ordinance attainment reflects a tradition of planning in the area (starting with William Penn's plan for Philadelphia); the pressures of growth and development (more than 30 percent of the Commonwealth's population lives in southeastern Pennsylvania); and the active promotion of planning and plan implementation by the City of Philadelphia and the Bucks, Chester, Delaware and Montgomery County planning commissions.

Despite southeastern Pennsylvania's excellent record in enacting the basic planning tools, the current state of planning and decision-making in the region is very fragmented. The outcome is a land use control system that is bottom-up and subject to the whims of multiple, local jurisdictions for day-to-day decisions on what, where and how growth and development will take place in the Philadelphia region. Some do it very well, some do it fairly well and others do it poorly. It depends on your perspective, **but** it also depends on the visual, physical, social and environmental impacts which flow from new development.

III. CONSEQUENCES OF GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

Fragmented decision-making and inadequate planning tools are contributing causes of the problems of growth and development. The outcome for communities and the quality of life of local residents is sprawl, congestion, air pollution, infrastructure demands and a lack of identity. Each of these problems can be summarized as follows:

A. **Sprawl:** A sprawling development pattern epitomizes the post-World War II suburbanization of America, but this has not always been the case.

Earlier suburbs, particularly those built around the street car systems of the 1920's and 1930's, reflected a more compact development pattern which facilitated use of public transit and walking to reach neighborhood-oriented services and facilities. With the increasing use of the automobile for personal transport and the population growth boom which occurred in the 1950's and 1960's, the focus of development decentralized away from central cities and toward the small towns and farming communities scattered across the countryside. The development pattern which resulted **broke the link** between transportation and land use which had developed historically. Instead, **highway access** was taken for granted and land use decisions were (and are) often made without regard for the effects on highway congestion, public transit, the loss of pedestrian scale or the impacts on adjacent communities.

Scattered, formless, leap-frog development, which clogs the frontage of local roads and produces a sea of unsightly signs and repetitive curb cuts for local access, is a result of suburban sprawl and strip development.

More critically, another by-product of sprawl is the loss of open space, productive farmlands, scenic vistas and any sense of being a community. A June 1990 study of farmland preservation programs, prepared by the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, found that southeastern Pennsylvania lost almost 74,500 acres (18%) of farmland between 1982 and 1987, lowering the region's farmland acreage from 413,400 to 338,900 acres. Bucks County lost 24 percent of its farmland, Chester County 14 percent, Delaware County 12 percent and Montgomery County 23 percent.

In response, planners promoted enhanced subdivision design with curvalinear streets with lots surrounded by extensive landscaping and reverse frontage lots which avoid curb cuts on local roads. More appropriately, planners have promoted cluster development, in many forms, which is intended to maintain current density but yields smaller lots, closer together, with the land saved by not developing to the traditional lot size pooled into a permanent open space area. However, these subdivision and site planning techniques have met with mixed success and infrequent application by local officials skeptical of anything new or different from the community norm.

Even less successful have been efforts to increase the density of development or to introduce a variety of dwelling types, lot sizes and mixed use developments in communities. The predominant housing style is the single-family detached dwelling, at low densities of one dwelling unit or less per acre with occasional densities as high as two units per acre (1/2 acre lots). Southeastern Pennsylvania, in particular, reflects a conservative market preference for large lot, single-family subdivisions with great resistance to attached housing or smaller lot sizes. Without the impetus of a string of Pennsylvania Supreme Court and Commonwealth Court cases during the 1970's and 1980's, the landscape of suburban Pennsylvania would have even fewer apartments and townhouses than it has at present.

B. **Congestion:** A highway-dominant and auto-dependent development pattern yields more trips, the need for more automobiles and more vehicle miles of travel. Unrestricted curb cuts for access and the need to be located on major arteries, overloads existing highways and creates new demands for road widening, bypasses and expressways. It is a vicious cycle!

The Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission has well documented the increasing congestion on southeastern Pennsylvania's highway network. Their studies have shown traffic volume growth of six percent annually on major regional arterials; double the "normal" growth rate of three percent for other major metropolitan regions. Some expressways, like I-476 (the Blue Route) and the Route 422 Expressway from King of Prussia to Pottstown, are experiencing traffic volume growth well in excess of 10 percent per year.

In addition, the region's auto ownership, vehicle trips and vehicle miles of travel are forecasted to grow at **double to triple** the rate of population, employment and households over the next 25 years. These growth trends point out the **severe** congestion problems facing the region and the consequences of a decentralized, sprawling and low density development pattern which necessitates a vehicle trip (or two or three) for every daily need (work, shopping, school, recreation).

C. **Air Pollution:** Southeastern Pennsylvania is part of a larger region which has been designated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as a severe non-attainment area for ozone and a moderate non-attainment area for carbon monoxide. Approximately 60 percent of these pollutants are attributable to mobile sources (vehicle exhausts). Thus, additional traffic growth not only is frustrating to commuters but poisons the air we breath.

Failure to deal with the region's non-attainment status could result in future sanctions on highway funding or extra burdens on industries in Pennsylvania. Given the present